

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 018
INFO AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO
AMEMBASSY QUITO
AMEMBASSY LIMA
DIA WASHDC
USCINCSO QUARRY HTS CZ J-2

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 LA PAZ 2413

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PBOR, CI, BL
SUBJECT: BANZER JUSTIFIES CORRIDOR DIPLOMACY

1. SUMMARY: ON MARCH 21, PRESIDENT BANZER PARLAYED WIDE-SPREAD POPULAR ENTHUSIASM FOR BOLIVIA'S DECISION TO BREAK DIPLOMATIC TIES WITH CHILE INTO AN OPPORTUNITY TO DELIVER A LENGTHY EMOTIONAL JUSTIFICATION OF HIS SEA-CORRIDOR DIPLOMACY. HIS PROTEGE, PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE JUAN PEREDA, HELPED ORGANIZE THE DEMONSTRATION AT WHICH BANZER SPOKE, BUT REAPED NO TANGIBLE BENEFITS FROM IT. TOWARD THE CLOSE OF HIS SPEECH, BANZER EXHORTED BOLIVIANS TO WORK HARDER IN ORDER TO "FORTIFY" THE COUNTRY, AVERRING THAT ONLY THOSE WITH "CANNONS AND PLANES" CAN MAKE THEIR WEIGHT FELT INTERNATIONALLY. FINALLY, BANZER URGED HIS COUNTRYMEN NOT TO DIVIDE THE ARMED FORCES. HE CLAIMED THAT THE SERVICE COMMANDERS HAD RECENTLY REITERATED THEIR COMMITMENT TO SUPPORT THE DEMOCRATIZATION PROCESS "AT ANY COST," BUT WOULD NOT STAND IDLY BY IF DEMAGOGUES AND ANARCHISTS TRIED TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE COUNTRY. FOLLOWING THE SPEECH, BANZER TOLD REPORTERS THAT HE MEANT THE NATION SHOULD "FORTIFY" ITSELF BY ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT, AND ARMED FORCES
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CHIEF OF STAFF VICTOR GONZALES ADDED THAT BOLIVIA HAD NO INTENTION OF RUSHING OUT TO BUY ARMS. THE MOTIVATION BEHIND THE BANZER GOVERNMENT'S DECISION TO BREAK WITH CHILE REMAINS UNCLEAR. SENSITIVE TO CRITICISM OF HIS GOVERNMENT'S CONDUCT OF THE NEGOTIATIONS WITH CHILE, HOWEVER, BANZER WILL CERTAINLY TRY TO USE THE EMOTIONAL SEA-OUTLET ISSUE TO HIS POLITICAL ADVANTAGE. END SUMMARY

2. BUOYED BY WIDE-SPREAD PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR HIS GOVERNMENT'S DECISION TO BREAK DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH CHILE, PRESIDENT BANZER USED THE OCCASION OF A MASS RALLY ON MARCH 21 TO MOUNT AN EMOTIONAL DEFENSE OF HIS SEA OUTLET DIPLOMACY. STANDING ON A BALCONY OF THE GOVERNMENTAL PALACE, BANZER ADDRESSED A RECEPTIVE IF NOT PARTICULARLY VOLUABLE CROWD OF ABOUT 5,000, MANY OF WHOM BRANDISHED PATRIOTIC PLACARDS AND FLAGS. THE DEMONSTRATION WAS ORGANIZED WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE AND BANZER PROTEGE JUAN PEREDA, WHO STOOD WITH A CLAQUE OF HIS NATIONALIST PEOPLE'S UNION SUPPORTERS BELOW.

3. THE BULK OF BANZER'S ADDRESS, WHICH LASTED NEARLY AN HOUR, WAS DEVOTED TO A CHRONOLOGICAL REVIEW OF THE NEGOTIATIONS WITH CHILE. HE CONTENDED THAT HE HAD RECEIVED A MANDATE TO PRESS FOR A SEA OUTLET DURING THE NATIONAL CONSULTATIVE MEETING (INVOLVING GOVERNMENT AND POLITICAL PARTY REPRESENTATIVES) WHICH TOOK PLACE IN COCHABAMBA IN 1974. FOLLOWING THIS MEETING, BANZER SAID, HIS GOVERNMENT FORMED THE NATIONAL MARITIME COMMISSION, WHERE BOLIVIA'S NEGOTIATING STRATEGY WAS CONCEIVED. AT THE SAME TIME, IN AN EFFORT TO ACQUAINT THE WORLD WITH BOLIVIA'S NEED FOR AN OUTLET, BANZER CONTINUED, THEN-FOREIGN MINISTER MARIO GUTIERREZ TOURED SOUTH AMERICA, ASIA AND EUROPE. THIS INITIATIVE WAS COMPLEMENTED BY BANZER'S OWN TRAVELS THROUGHOUT SOUTH AMERICA AND TO THE UN. BANZER CLAIMED THAT THE SUCCESS OF THESE MISSIONS WAS REGISTERED BY INTERNATIONAL EXPRESSIONS

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OF SUPPORT AT THE 1974 OAS MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE IN ATLANTA AND THE AYACUCHO CELEBRATIONS LATER THAT SAME YEAR.

4. AFTER HIS MEETING WITH PINOCHET AT CHARANA, BANZER SAID, BOLIVIA HAD SUBMITTED TO CHILE A FORMAL PROPOSAL FOR A CORRIDOR TO THE SEA. WHEN CHILE LATER COUNTERED WITH CERTAIN "CONDITIONS" (INCLUDING THE TERRITORIAL EXCHANGE REQUIREMENT), BANZER EXPLAINED, THESE WERE ACCEPTED "GLOBALLY, AND BY NO MEANS SPECIFICALLY" IN ORDER TO KEEP THE DIALOGUE GOING.

5. ALTHOUGH THE NEGOTIATIONS BEGAN AUSPICIOUSLY, BANZER SAID, THEY BECAME FROZEN WHEN CHILE BEGAN CONSULTATIONS WITH PERU AS REQUIRED BY THE 1920 TREATY. IN AN EFFORT TO BREAK THIS DEAD-LOCK, BOLIVIA "FORCED" A TRI-PARTITE MEETING OF PRESIDENTS IN WASHINGTON LAST YEAR; THIS WAS FOLLOWED UP BY A MEETING OF THE FOREIGN MINISTERS IN NEW YORK. AS NO PROGRESS WAS ACHIEVED, BANZER CONTINUED, SPECIAL EMISSARY WILLY VARGAS WAS DISPATCHED TO SANTIAGO THIS MONTH TO TRY TO "CLARIFY" THE SITUATION. "LAMENTABLY", HOWEVER, WHAT VARGAS LEARNED IS THAT THE BOLIVIAN CAUSE, FAR FROM "ADVANCING", HAD IN FACT BEEN SET BACK. "THIS," BANZER EXPLAINED, "IS WHAT BROUGHT ABOUT THE BREAK IN RELATIONS."

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6. IN ONE OF THE MOST EMOTIONAL MOMENTS OF HIS SPEECH, BANZER EXHORTED THAT NOW WAS NOT THE TIME FOR BOLIVIANS TO STAND WITH THEIR ARMS CROSSED. INSTEAD, THE NATION SHOULD WORK AS NEVER BEFORE TO "FORTIFY" ("POTENCIAR") ITSELF. THIS WAS NECESSARY BECAUSE ONLY A COUNTRY "WITH CANNONS AND PLANES CAN SPEAK STRONGLY". BANZER ENDED HIS SPEECH WITH AN APPEAL FOR SUPPORT FOR THE ARMED FORCES, WHICH, HE SAID, "WE MUST NOT DIVIDE BECAUSE WE WILL NEED THEM TO REGAIN THE SEA". HE SAID BOLIVIANS SHOULD ALSO PROTECT THE INTEGRITY OF THE ARMED FORCES BECAUSE THEY "TAKE THE CHESTNUTS FROM THE FIRE WHEN THE DEMAGOGUES AND ANARCHISTS WANT TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE COUNTRY." FINALLY, BANZER CLAIMED THAT THE ARMED FORCES COMMANDERS HAD RECENTLY CONFIRMED THEIR COMMITMENT TO SUPPORT THE DEMOCRATIZATION PROCESS "AT ANY COST" -- WHICH DID NOT MEAN, HOWEVER, THAT CHAOS AND ANARCHY WOULD BE TOLERATED.

7. AFTER HIS SPEECH, BANZER HELD A PRESS CONFERENCE, REPORTED IN THE GOVERNMENT-ORIENTED NEWSPAPER "HOY", DURING WHICH HE SAID THAT HIS EXHORTATION TO "FORTIFY" THE NATION MEANT ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT, INCLUDING GREATER BENEFITS FROM BOLIVIA'S
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NATURAL RESOURCES, AND THIS WOULD IN ITSELF STRENGTHEN THE BOLIVIAN ARMED FORCES. THE ARMED FORCES CHIEF OF STAFF, VICTOR GONZALES, SUBSEQUENTLY TOLD THE PRESS THAT BANZER'S STATEMENT DID NOT MEAN THAT BOLIVIA WOULD PROCEED IMMEDIATELY TO PURCHASE ARMS OR TO PREPARE FOR AN ARMED CONFLICT.

8. COMMENT: THE MOTIVATION BEHIND THE BANZER GOVERNMENT'S DECISION TO BREAK RELATIONS WITH CHILE REMAINS UNCLEAR. ON THE SURFACE IT APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN TRIGGERED BY THE REPORT SPECIAL EMISSARY VARGAS BROUGHT BACK FROM SANTIAGO, BUT CHILE'S ALLEGED HARDENING OF ITS POSITION MAY HAVE ONLY PROVIDED A PRETEXT FOR A STEP BANZER HAD BEEN CONSIDERING FOR SOME TIME. IN RECENT WEEKS, BANZER HAS COME UNDER INCREASING FIRE FOR THE CONDUCT OF HIS SEA-OUTLET DIPLOMACY. HE WAS PARTICULARLY CONCERNED ABOUT A PLANNED DENUNCIATION OF HIS DIPLOMATIC EFFORTS BY THE "TOPATER" GROUP OF RETIRED, DISSIDENT MILITARY OFFICERS. BANZER MAY HAVE DECIDED THAT A BREAK WITH CHILE WOULD ENABLE HIM TO PREEMPT POINT-BY-POINT DISCUSSION OF HIS VULNERABLE POSITION ON THIS ISSUE AND PUT THE PUBLIC DISCUSSION ON AN EMOTIONAL LEVEL WHERE HE COULD TURN THIS OPPOSITION CURRENT TO HIS ADVANTAGE. CERTAINLY, THE TIMING OF THE BREAK, WHICH COINCIDED WITH BOLIVIA'S ANNUAL WEEK OF THE SEA, LENDS PLAUSIBILITY TO THIS THEORY. HOW OR WHETHER BANZER WILL CONTINUE TO TRY TO EXPLOIT THE RUPTURE WITH CHILE IS CONJECTURABLE. IT IS USEFUL TO KEEP IN MIND, HOWEVER, THAT THE SEA-OUTLET ISSUE TAPS BOLIVIA'S DEEPEST EMOTIONS, AND BANZER WILL NOW TRY TO USE IT TO HIS POLITICAL ADVANTAGE.
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